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TOWARD A KINDER, GENTLER, AND MORE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORAL APPROACH IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

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Behaviorists who conduct research in community settings often encounter a variety of conceptual, methodological, and practical barriers, many of which were succinctly described in Fawcett's (1991) article. Below, we explore several of the impediments that most significantly limit the ability of behaviorists to be more effective in solving social and community problems.

Fawcett (1991) correctly suggests that in order to exert an influence at a higher level of analysis, more attention should be given to legislative initiatives. It is likely that many of our efforts in this realm will lack the experimental rigor of traditional behavioral methodology (Jason, 1991). Two case studies illustrate this point. In the mid-1980s, the first author used a variety of comprehensive reinforcers within a multiple baseline design to encourage owners of restaurants to establish no-smoking sections in their restaurants; these voluntary efforts were ineffective. A short time later, Chicago legislators were considering an ordinance to mandate the establishment of no-smoking sections in restaurants. When opponents of this ordinance stated that voluntary efforts would be adequate to solve this problem, our study was presented as evidence that a voluntary approach was ineffective, and the ordinance subsequently passed.

A more recent effort involved attempts to stop cigarette sales to minors by store merchants in a suburb of Chicago. When an educational approach failed to solve the problem, legislation was passed that required merchants to obtain a license to sell cigarettes, and fines were administered if sales to minors occurred during a follow-up compliance phase. Over the past 2 years, cigarette sales to minors have been reduced from 70% to below 5%, and student rates of smoking in the schools have declined by more than 50%.

At times, it is necessary to use legislative initiatives to bring about behavior change. When data from our intervention conditions indicate that our approaches are ineffective, these findings can sometimes be used to argue for legislative change. In studying change with legislative initiatives, it is often difficult to identify two cities with interest in participating in a project (for a multiple baseline design), to withdraw the legislative initiative after a period of time, or to have the legislation apply to only one section of the city at the time. In other words, when evaluating change due to legislation, we often have access to behavioral data that involve only a baseline and an intervention phase (a weak experimental design). If we are at any early stage in the evolution of behavioral research involving higher levels of analysis, then it might be appropriate for studies with weaker designs to be considered for publication in a special section of *JABA*, perhaps entitled "Legislative Initiatives." These articles might encourage other investigators to experiment with this type of research and ultimately to employ more sophisticated and elegant behavioral designs when investigating legislative initiatives.

A second issue concerns the extent to which behavioral solutions are appropriate for solving community problems, and whether the interven-

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tions can be sustainable with local resources. Behaviorists sometimes have resources for solving problems that are unavailable to the community participants. Undoubtedly, there are occasions in which expensive resources are needed to demonstrate that change can occur; subsequently, more economical interventions can be planned. Although this argument sounds compelling, we believe behaviorists sometimes fail to progress to the next step and develop low-cost, sustainable interventions.

For many social problems, it might be possible and desirable to use resources primarily from the community, and to work with interventions designed and owned by the community residents. Below, we present an example that illustrates some of the advantages of this alternative approach. Oxford House is an organization of former alcoholics and drug addicts who live together in Oxford Homes; there are presently over 200 of these homes across the United States. Each resident pays for his or her rent and lives in fellowship with similar recovering individuals. Drinking or use of drugs leads to eviction from the house. The rules and programs are developed by the residents. Recidivism rates are remarkably low. There are no mental health professionals involved in this effort. Federal funds are not needed to sustain this intervention. In this era of deepening federal deficits and growing trade imbalances, we can expect fewer state and federal financial resources to help solve our mounting community problems. In part because of this erosion in federal and state funds, programs like Oxford House become promising alternatives. Behaviorists may have a role in identifying reinforcers within these types of settings and in helping to understand the process of short- and long-term change. Our discipline might benefit from a stronger emphasis on the identification, validation, and creation of supportive environments whose natural contingencies support the development of fellowship, autonomy, and self-reliance.

The most controversial value addressed by Fawcett (1991) concerns the issue of collaboration. Although leading community theorists state that participants should be actively involved in identifying problems and designing interventions, in practice few of their efforts have incorporated these values and procedures. If few community practitioners have abided by this value, is it realistic to expect behaviorists to embrace this practice? Some behaviorists will reject any notion of collaboration because involving participants in planning the experiment might bias the data. This problem could be overcome if some representative community residents were involved in the collaborative process, and observations focused on individuals who had not been involved in this process.

Some behaviorists might claim that the collaboration process always needs to occur in order to gain the cooperation of the participants. As an illustration of this point, we recently implemented a prevention program in the schools; extensive contact and negotiations occurred in several schools, and minimal contact and preparation occurred in others. A significantly higher rate of completed data was obtained from the schools in which more preparation and dialogue with teachers had occurred. However, the intervention had been planned before approaching the schools, and implementation issues were the only ones discussed during the collaboration. Involving participants in the identification of the problem and the design of the intervention is an activity rarely engaged in by either behavioral or community psychologists.

But what possible rewards can be earned by investigators who actively adopt a more extensive collaboration model? We believe there are enormous benefits to this approach. In the study involving cigarette sales to minors, mentioned earlier, a police officer was actively involved in all stages of identifying the problem, designing the intervention, and monitoring compliance. Because of this high level of involvement, the officer was able to use his direct experience with this problem (i.e., helping to gather the baseline data, which documented unacceptably high levels of cigarette sales and the failure of educational efforts) to gain the necessary political support needed to pass the law. As the project developed, over 100 newspaper articles described the project, and the officer was prominently profiled in many of these reports. The

officer testified at congressional hearings in Washington, and many of our recommendations were adopted by Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan, who has proposed national legislation on restricting cigarette sales to minors.

The manuscript describing the above study was rejected by the editor of a prestigious medical journal. Because the police officer involved in the study had gradually achieved national prominence in the area, he was asked to review, by the same journal's editor, a different study involving cigarette sales to minors that emphasized educational initiatives. In his review, the officer wrote that the study under review had not solved the problem, but a previous article that had been rejected had pioneered effective legislative methods to solve the problem. A week later, the editor asked for reconsideration of the original article, and a revised manuscript was eventually accepted for publication. Clearly, tangible rewards can be earned from employing collaborative methods in behavioral research.

These notions of working for change at higher levels, building community support, and using intensive collaboration might seem somewhat imprecise and vague. However, our greatest legacy may be the extent to which we have provided individuals with skills to actively participate in solving their own problems. The next generation of idealistic behavioral investigators who work in community settings will benefit from seriously considering Fawcett's many fine recommendations.

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